

February 14, 2014

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing Testimony

Julie Peters (Presented by Carrie Kramer)

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My name is Julie Peters, Executive Director at the Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut. I am submitting this testimony in opposition to H.B. No. 5052, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HUMAN SERVICES PROGRAMS. With this budget proposal, the Governor has once again recommended elimination of the Services for Persons with Disabilities line item, which includes funding for BIAC to provide critical services to CT citizens.

I wish you all a Happy Valentine's Day. I just wish our Governor had more love for the social service programs which provide the critical safety net essential to our most vulnerable citizens of Connecticut.

For almost 30 years, BIAC has received an operating grant from the Department of Social Services to provide resources and supports which the State is unable to provide. **No one else does what BIAC does**, which is why DSS contracts with BIAC to provide the many essential services that DSS is not equipped to offer. Each year since 2009, this grant has been threatened. Each year, you, the Appropriations Committee, has heard the concerns of those we support and reinstated BIAC's funding.

The Department of Public Health estimates that more than 8,000 CT residents will sustain a brain injury each year. Traumatic brain injuries now disable more people each year than spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, HIV/AIDS, and breast cancer combined — *six times more!* Many of those individuals and their families will need assistance with the long and complex process of rebuilding their lives. Who provides that assistance? The Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut.

In his budget proposal again this year, the Governor does not seem to understand that the Department of Social Services **contracts with BIAC to provide services required as part of the Medicaid ABI Waiver program**. The contract with BIAC is used as evidence in five sections of the Waiver application showing that DSS is meeting the obligations of this federal program. BIAC's responsibilities include providing a statewide toll free support number staffed by brain injury specialists which fields thousands of calls each year from individuals with brain injury, their families and caretakers; facilitating monthly support group

meetings throughout CT; providing independent advocacy for participants on the Waiver; supporting participants in service plan development and serving as an advocate who informs participants of their rights and supports them at team meetings.

BIAC provides critical training and consultation to most of the State key agencies- including DSS, VA, DCF, DPH, DOE, DOC, DMHAS, DDS, and BRS to assure that all those who are working with an individual with a brain injury understand the issues they face. In fact, the services we offer are so comprehensive that the DSS public awareness campaign on brain injury, which they use each year, does not list any DSS phone number on their billboards and signs. ***It lists the BIAC Helpline number (see attached photograph.)***

If BIAC's contract with DSS would end, with the cut of this vital funding, DSS would no longer have the mechanism to provide these essential services required as part of the ABI Medicaid Waiver. And how much does this cost the state? **Just \$118,918 last year.** Yet despite an increase of over 600% in calls to BIAC's helpline, BIAC has received only reductions in this grant in over 10 years. Each year, our staff is forced to do more with less as funding has not kept up with demand. Despite an aggressive fund development effort on our part, we just can't raise the important funding needed to do our job.

Years ago, most serious brain injuries were fatal. Thanks to modern medicine, that has changed. However, medicine is not able to restore "life as they knew it" to those who survive or to their loved ones. Even BIAC cannot to do that — but we can and do provide brain injury survivors and their families with the ongoing support and resources needed to optimize recovery, and that makes the Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut a genuinely critical lifeline on what is always a very long and difficult journey back.

The bottom line is this: With BIAC the State's *de facto* resource for brain injury services, eliminating BIAC's operating grant will devastate the delivery of services and supports to thousands of Connecticut residents and the ever-increasing number of returning veterans whose lives have been shattered by the experience of brain injury — and that really *is* something the State will not be able to afford.

I ask that you commit to **increase funding** for the Brain Injury Alliance of Connecticut within the Department of Social Services and protect both the grant and those we serve - in the months and years to come. Then it will truly be a happy Valentine's Day for each and every brain injury survivor in Connecticut. I thank you.

**No matter what you call it... It might be a
BRAIN INJURY**

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Para mas Información

For More Information Contact BIAC at 1(800) 278-8242

